Blackness in Mestizo America: The Cases of Mexico and Peru

Christina A. Sue and Tanya Golash-Boza

Since the late 1980s, there has been an explosion in diaspora studies across the globe, giving rise to debates within this nascent field of inquiry (Brubaker 2005). Diaspora scholars are struggling to address the complicated questions of how to define the diaspora, how to understand the diasporic experience, and whether or not we can speak about such an experience in any unifying sense. In this article, through an analysis of the experiences of members of the so called African diaspora in Mexico and Peru, we contribute to these debates by challenging a series of fundamental assumptions embedded in portions of this literature. We problematize the assumption that individuals of a particular diaspora will share a common identity or hold a diasporic consciousness. Further- more, we argue against the idea of a linear relationship between memo- ries of slavery, understandings of ancestry, and constructions of racial identity. Finally, we contend that forces such as urbanization and global- ization or even exposure to the greater diaspora will not automatically lead to a diasporic consciousness.

We draw on qualitative data to address the relationship between slavery, racial ancestry, and racial identity among populations of African descent in Mexico and Peru. We ask: *How do Mexicans and Peruvians of* African descent construct their notions of slavery, ancestry, and contemporary identities, and how are these constructions understood in relation to an African diaspora? In the following sections, we address the relevant literature and discuss our selection of the cases of Mexico and Peru. We then provide a brief background of each case, discuss our

methodological approach, and present our findings.

Theoretical Overview

Within the diaspora literature, there is controversy regarding how best to define diaspora and how to determine who qualifies as a member of a particular diaspora. Prominent conceptualizations focus on disper- sion in space or orientation to a common homeland (Brubaker 2005). The dispersion definition is most commonly used by scholars (Brown 2006), many of whom seek to uncover a thread of unity or collective experience among individuals of a certain diaspora. Critics argue this

definition is overly expansive and has little analytic power to capture a distinct experience (Brubaker 2005). Furthermore, they are concerned that a focus on commonalities between African-origin populations over- looks important differences (Campt 2006; Lewis 2000; Yelvington 2006).

Over the past few decades, there has been substantial scholarly writ- ing on the African diaspora in Latin America.1 However, broad defini- tions of diaspora have obscured the wide range of experiences and iden- tities of individuals of African descent in this region. To speak of what it means to be "black" in contemporary Latin America generally involves making invalid generalizations about a diverse population in a vast and variegated region. Like Hoffman (2006), in this study we are wary of imposing categories which assume a black identity or common exper- ience. Therefore, we focus on "strong" definitions of diaspora (e.g. orientation to homeland) that emphasize diaspora as a social form (Brubaker 2005). Despite the importance of investigating orientations to homeland among

the descendants of African slaves, minimal research has been conducted on this topic in Latin America. Furthermore, few scholars have explored the relationship between orientations to home- land, memory of slavery, understandings of ancestry, and identity con- struction.

In scholarly accounts of the African diaspora, it is frequently implied, if not directly stated, that there is a strong interconnection between notions of slavery, ancestry, and identity. It is oftentimes presumed that communities of African descent will retain collective memories of slav- ery and connect these memories to their own ancestries and identities. For example, Paul Gilroy (1993) attributes many aspects of black dias- poric cultural production to the memory of slavery and contends that the memory of slavery is a key cultural resource for people in the African diaspora. However, in this article, we take a step back, asking: Is the memory of slavery always preserved? Is it always important or central to the construction of identity and culture?

We take the perspective that, although persons of African descent in the Americas*may* share similar conceptions of slavery, ancestry, and identity, it cannot be assumed that they*necessarily* will. Similar to Herman Bennett (2000, 112), instead of assuming that all persons of African descent will retain a memory of slavery, claim African ancestry, and develop black identities, we pose a fundamental question: *Under what circumstances will conditions of slavery and oppression produce a black consciousness?* This perspective moves us away from essentialistic thinking that equates African ancestry with memories of slavery and collective

blackness (Vinson 2006). In taking this stance, we do not intend to distance persons of African descent from the conditions of a brutal past and discriminatory present, but instead, we want to stress that these conditions may produce various outcomes in terms of understandings of slavery, ancestry, and identity. As such, we are interested in interrogating the*meaning* and*construction* of memories of slavery, ancestral ties, and self-identification for persons of African descent.

Scholars have primarily addressed issues of slavery and ancestral ties in Brazil, Colombia, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. For example, Twine (1998) found that Brazilians of African descent tend to distance themselves intentionally from "the degradation of slavery" by claiming their ancestors were not slaves (116). Similarly, in Colombia, many people of African descent attempt to distance themselves from slavery (Restrepo 2004) and construct their ancestry as being Colombian as opposed to African (Losonczy 1999). In the Dominican Republic, individuals also distance themselves from African ancestry by defining Haitians, not Dominicans, as Africans (Howard 2001). In terms of identity, scholars have found low levels of black consciousness and a rejection of a black identity in Brazil (Burdick 1998; Hanchard 1994; Telles 2004; Twine 1998), Venezuela (Wright 1990), Colombia (Wade 1993, 1997), Puerto Rico (Godreau 2000, 2006) and the Dominican Republic (Howard 2001). Recently, however, researchers have found, in countries such as Brazil, that some individuals are embracing a

black identity (McCallum 2005; Sansone 2003; Sheriff 2001).

Although the aforementioned studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of the multiple meanings of blackness in Latin America, most of the work has been conducted in a few select countries in the region. Furthermore, although slavery, ancestry, and identity have been addressed to some degree, scholars often have emphasized only one or two of these components, as opposed to the interconnection of all three. To begin to fill these gaps in the literature, in this study we address the intersection between memories of slavery, understandings of ancestry, and constructions of identity for individuals of African descent in the understudied contexts of Mexico and Peru.

Case Selection

Within Latin America, scholars have categorized countries into two main types: Afro-Latin America and*mestizo* America (Mörner 1967). Afro-Latin America includes countries such as Brazil and the Spanish- speaking Caribbean, which exhibit a black/white racial continuum and

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Under what circumstances will conditions of slavery and oppression produce a black consciousness? This perspective moves us away from essentialistic thinking that equates African ancestry with memories of slavery and collective blackness (Vinson 2006). In taking this stance, we do not intend to distance persons of African descent from the conditions of a brutal past and discriminatory present, but instead, we want to stress that these conditions may produce various outcomes in terms of understandings of slavery, ancestry, and identity. As such, we are interested in interrogating the *meaning* and *construction* of memories of slavery, ancestral ties, and self-identification for persons of African descent.

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Although the aforementioned studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of the multiple meanings of blackness in Latin America, most of the work has been conducted in a few select countries in the region. Furthermore, although slavery, ancestry, and identity have been addressed to some degree, scholars often have emphasized only one or two of these components, as opposed to the interconnection of all three. To begin to fill these gaps in the literature, in this study we address the intersection between memories of slavery, understandings of ancestry, and constructions of identity for individuals of African descent in the understudied contexts of Mexico and Peru.

Case Selection

Within Latin America, scholars have categorized countries into two main types: Afro-Latin America and*mestizo* America (Mörner 1967). Afro-Latin America includes countries such as Brazil and the Spanish- speaking Caribbean, which exhibit a black/white racial continuum and

have a history of plantation-based slavery.2*Mestizo* America refers to Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, among other countries, where the primary ethnic or racial dynamic involves the Indian/*mestizo* [mixed-race person] distinction (Mörner 1967; Harris 1964; Wade 1997). In this article, as opposed to focusing on racial classification systems or racial demographics to make the Afro-Latin America versus mestizo America distinction, we focus on race-based national ideologies. Consequently, we define Afro-Latin American countries as those

where blackness has been recognized in the image of the nation and mestizo American countries as those where the indige- nous narrative has been dominant.

In Afro-Latin America, blackness is oftentimes considered to be an integral part of national culture (Oboler and Dzidzienyo 2005). In cases such as Brazil and Cuba, blackness periodically has been framed as some- thing positive at the national level (de la Fuente 2001; Marx 1998; Telles 2004). In countries such as Colombia and Venezuela, blacks have been included in symbolic constructions of the nation, albeit to a lesser extent, and in more consistently disparaging ways (Wade 1993, 1997; Wright 1990). Traditionally, the literature on blackness has focused on Afro- Latin America; the African-origin communities of *mestizo* America have received less attention.

In *mestizo* America, the indigenous contribution to race mixture and national culture has been central to narratives of the nation, oftentimes coinciding with the exclusion of the African element (de la Cadena 2000; Foote 2004; Hernández-Cuevas 2004; Vaughn 2001). This was espe- cially apparent in the early twentieth century when national ideologies and race-mixing projects defined the dominant mixture as indigenous and European. The marginalization of the African-origin population occurred not only in the realm of ideology but was also present in the academic literature. As Arocha and Maya (2008) note, "Despite advances in studies about Latin America and the Caribbean, scholars in the North continue to associate indigenous America with Mexico and Peru, and Afro-America with Cuba and Brazil" (401); this has led to a traditional lack of research on the issue of blackness in *mestizo* American countries.

Over the past few decades, there has been an increase in scholarly work on the history of slavery and the influence of African culture in some countries of*mestizo* America, such as Mexico.4 However, less attention has been paid to identity construction and the contemporary experience of individuals of African descent. In Mexico, of the studies that do exist, most focus on the Costa Chica,5 with minimal attention being paid to other regions with African-origin populations, such as Veracruz.6 In the case of Peru, to the best of our knowledge, there are no published studies on this topic. Because of the relative neglect of blackness in*mestizo* America, we still do not have a solid understanding of important questions such as: *What does it mean to be black or of African origin in regions where blackness is largely excluded from the image of the nation?*

We present the *mestizo* American case studies of Mexico and Peru to shed light on this question and related issues. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Mexico and Peru were the largest importers of African slaves in Spanish America (Palmer 1976). Therefore, contem- porary Mexicans and Peruvians of African descent frequently have ancestors who arrived via the Atlantic slave trade. The Mexico-Peru contrast was used by Mallon (1985) to address peasant struggles in these two regions. She argued that the main distinction between these coun- tries was that Mexico was able to incorporate indigenous demands into their agenda via the rhetoric of*mestizaje* whereas Peruvian elites tended to repress the indigenous population. Despite these differences, Mexico and Peru are similar in that indigenous/*mestizo* narratives have played and continue to play a central role in national ideology (de la Cadena 2000; Knight 1990; Urías Horcasitas 2007). Furthermore, elites in both countries have historically denied the African-origin presence in their countries and generally have assumed that peoples of African-

descent have “disappeared” (Aguirre Beltrán 1970; Bowser 1974; van den Berghe 1967; Vaughn 2005).

Background on Mexico

Shortly after the Spanish conquest, there was a sharp decline in the indigenous population and a consequent need for labor, which spurred the importation of Africans to Mexico (Vaughn 2001). Slaves were brought to Mexico throughout the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries with the majority of imports occurring during the seventeenth century (Aguirre Beltrán 1944).7 The generally accepted view is that about 200,000 African slaves reached Mexico’s shores, although the number may have been higher since many slaves were imported illegally (Aguirre Beltrán 1944; Vaughn 2001). Slaves usually were imported through Veracruz and Acapulco and later migrated throughout Mexico (Aguirre Beltrán [1946] 1989; Martínez Montiel 1997; van den Berghe 1967). They primarily worked in mines, on sugar haciendas, or as domestic ser- vants. When the slave system collapsed in the early 1700s, the biological integration of the population increased. Mexico’s African-origin popula- tion lost its identity as a separate racial category and increasingly mixed with the Indian and Spanish groups (Cope 1994).

In the wake of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), Mexican elites strongly promoted race mixture and deemed the*mestizo* the national symbol of Mexico (Knight 1990). During this time,*mestizaje* was defined as representing the mixture between Spaniards and Indians which marginaled the historical presence of blacks in the country (Vaughn 2005). The erasure of the African element in Mexico continued during the “cultural phase” of the Mexican Revolution (1920-1986) (Hernández-Cuevas 2004, 2005). Largely due to narratives of integra- tion, by this time, it was generally assumed that the African-origin population in Mexico had disappeared.8

Background on Peru

Between 1528 and 1821, more than 100,000 African slaves were brought to Peru (Aguirre 2005); they were mainly imported to meet labor needs, principally in coastal agriculture. The African-origin popu- lation in the country grew steadily throughout the sixteenth and seven- teenth centuries, fueled by the expanding slave trade (Schlüppman 1991). Notably, not all individuals of African descent were slaves—of the approximately 80,000 blacks and mulattoes in Peru in 1591, only 40,000 were enslaved (Castillo Román 1977). By the seventeenth centu- ry, the colony could not operate without Africans and their descendants (Bowser 1974). Slaves and free blacks worked on the coastal haciendas and played an important role in the urban economy, working as cooks, servants, butchers, wet nurses, bricklayers, blacksmiths, tailors, laun- dresses, and in other occupations (Aldana 1989; Bowser 1974).

Peru gained its independence from Spain in 1821, yet nation-building projects were not very successful until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Larson 2004). When efforts to build the new nation took off, the focus was primarily on the “Indian problem,” with little attention paid to Afro-Peruvians. Peruvian leaders proposed education- al reform as a solution to the “Indian problem” in the early twentieth century, but did not propose similar programs for the black population. In fact, blacks were imagined out of the nation—Peruvian officials downplayed the numbers of blacks in Peru, an effort reflected in official counts of the black

population during this time.9 Whereas elites focused on integrating the indigenous population, with regard to blacks, the pri- mary goal was elimination.

Case Comparison

In examining the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio cases, we notice some interesting similarities and differences. In both contexts, a strong con- nection to a collective memory of slavery or African ancestry is absent. Our findings suggest that the marginalization of discourses of slavery and African ancestry may be due to a lack of concrete knowledge about the African slave trade and/or one's ancestors as opposed to an inten- tional denial of this information, as has been posited in previous studies. Furthermore, when comparing these two cases we found an interesting oppositional dynamic— in the Port of Veracruz we see the phenomenon of "black ancestry without black identity" and in Ingenio "black identi- ty without African ancestry." Although seemingly contradictory, these two manifestations of a relationship between ancestry and identity actu- ally demonstrate an underlying similarity—the privileging of color in identity construction. Finally, the Port of Veracruz-Ingenio comparison revealed that respondents from Ingenio embraced a black identity, which was not the case in the Port of Veracruz. In this section, we will address these major findings in more depth.

The cases of the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio demonstrate that per- sons of African descent in these regions either do not retain the memo- ry of chattel slavery (Ingenio) or retain this memory but do not ascribe meaning to this memory as it relates to their own ancestries and identi- ties (Veracruz). The weak link to slavery that we have seen in these two cases may be due to the absence of state-endorsed efforts in*mestizo* America to retain memories of slavery and connect this history to the ancestral origins of the nation's population. In the absence of these state-sponsored efforts, genealogical histories are constructed locally; these constructions are determined by the racial hierarchy in a given site, the tradition of passing down ancestral information, and the degree of ancestral knowledge held by earlier generations. In the case of Veracruz, individuals privilege European ancestral information and readily trans- mit this knowledge. In contrast, they generally downplay or do not transmit ancestral knowledge related to African ancestry. In the case of Ingenio, there is a general lack of passing on knowledge about ancestors whether European, indigenous, or African. In both cases, there appears to be little to no familial knowledge of ancestry related to Africa.

Our findings complicate the literature on blackness in the region. Scholars have previously described the reported lack of knowledge about African ancestry by individuals of African descent as "denial," "avoid- ance" or "willful forgetting" of such heritage (Twine 1998; Winant 2001).

However, our findings suggest an alternative interpretation. In the case of Veracruz, respondents who did not report being of African ancestry generally did not appear to be intentionally hiding information about their African heritage; however, when respondents were aware of such heritage, there was a tendency to downplay it. Therefore, it is pos- sible that, instead of denying such heritage, respondents simply lack knowledge about African ancestors. Although it is difficult to uncover the actual degree of knowledge of respondents, our interpretation is sup- ported by other scholars' findings. For example, Cruz Carretero (1989) found that in Mata Clara, a rural town in the state of Veracruz, 56 per- cent of respondents were unsure about why there are blacks in the region or where they came from (94). Furthermore,

Martínez Montiel (1993) notes that in Mexico there is not a conscious negation of African heritage but a tradition of inheritance which has excluded discussion of African ancestors (157). Therefore, denial by previous generations might have evolved into a lack of knowledge for newer generations as the denial may have manifested in the lack of passing down ancestral information. The interpretation of a lack of knowledge as opposed to denial is most strongly supported by the case of Ingenio, where there is an absence of knowledge of ancestral roots across the board, including that of European ancestors.

Regarding the relationship between ancestry and identity, the cases of the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio demonstrate seemingly opposite trends. In the Port of Veracruz there is "ancestry without blackness"— a claim of black or African ancestry which does not usually translate into a black identity.21 However, in the case of Ingenio, we saw the opposite trend of "blackness without ancestry," where individuals self-identify as black without associating this identity with African heritage; a black identity exists devoid of any notion of ancestral connection to Africa or memory of slavery. Although our two cases provide seemingly conflict- ing findings, an underlying dynamic explains both manifestations of the relationship between ancestry and identity— the importance of pheno- type.

In Veracruz, the black label is conservatively applied and is reserved for those at the darkest end of the color continuum. Therefore, individ- uals with African ancestry but whose phenotypes do not represent the "blackest" component of the population are often not considered black in society. Phenotype overpowers ancestry in racial identity construc- tion. In Ingenio, phenotype is also very important and largely deter- mines who is considered black; however, these designations take place in the absence of connotations of African ancestry. Again, phenotype is more salient than ancestry. In Veracruz, notions of black or African ancestry are flexible and do not neatly overlap with a black identity. In Ingenio, black identities are expansive and generally do not overlap with or necessitate an understanding of African ancestry. In both cases, phe- notype is the main factor in identity construction.

In terms of identity, respondents in Ingenio were much more likely to claim a consistent black identity compared to Veracruz respondents. The findings from Ingenio challenge much of the literature on Latin Americans of African descent which presents an image of shunning con- temporary blackness and avoidance of the black category (Degler 1971; Hanchard 1994; Harris 1952; Twine 1998; Winant 2001). Our findings from both cases demonstrate that the avoidance of blackness, while sometimes occurring, is not the whole story; individuals of African descent exhibit myriad identities ranging from complete avoidance of blackness to embracing it. Returning to our comparison, the fact that black identities were more likely to surface in Ingenio, a rural, isolated setting, compared to the Port of Veracruz, an urban, international set- ting, challenges some existing assumptions about how and where black identities are most likely to form. We will address this final point in the conclusion.

Conclusion

In this article we have used qualitative data to shed light on the under- studied phenomenon of the experiences of individuals of African origin in parts of*mestizo* America. Mexico and Peru represent cases in*mestizo* America in which the collective memory of slavery and contemporary blackness are largely absent from national discourse. This contrasts sharply with many Afro-Latin American countries where national ide- ologies centralize slave histories, the African

contribution to national culture, and the African "root" of the population. In*mestizo* America, when there is an absence of national-level discourses addressing black- ness, local constructions of slavery, ancestry, and identity become more important. As such, it is necessary to interrogate the multiple manifesta- tions of local understandings of blackness, both in historical and con- temporary terms. In this article we addressed the *mestizo* American countries of Mexico and Peru.

Our findings have led us to make three principal arguments that con- tribute to the literature on blackness in Latin America and the broader literature on diasporas. First, we argue that many differences exist within the broadly defined "African diaspora" in Latin America and that it is important to take locality into account when interrogating these dynam- ics. We have adopted the perspective articulated by Clarke and Thomas (2006) that "identities remain bounded by local experiences" (27) and that "context is everything" when addressing the process of racial for- mation (32). In particular, we argue that scholars need to pay attention to the nations of mestizo America which have been understudied in the literature. Second, we argue that scholars need to spend more time inter- rogating the complicated relationship (or lack of) between notions of collective memory of slavery, ancestry, and identity, as opposed to assuming a linear relationship. Finally, by examining both rural and urban settings, we are able to demonstrate how the formation of a black consciousness is not necessarily stimulated by an urban environment, exposure to other individuals of African descent, or African diaspora ide- ologies and culture.

Related to our first point, we argue that scholars should not treat all African-origin communities as analytically similar, a frequent occur- rence when discussing the "African diaspora." For example, in reference to this diaspora, Hamilton et al. (2007) describe the "dispersed peoples of African descent" as "communities of consciousness" (31). Critiquing this approach, Campt problematizes "diaspora as the requisite approach or theoretical model through which one should (or perhaps must) understand all formations of black community, regardless of historical, geographical, or cultural context" (2006, 108). Others such as Hoffman (2006) and Brubaker (2005) problematize the outside imposition of the African diaspora concept on those who do not exhibit a black conscious- ness or whose identity is not associated with Africa as a homeland. The imposition of a diaspora label largely neglects the experience of individ- uals of African descent who feel little or no connection to Africa or a black identity.

So, to what degree should we think of these populations, which assert no connection to Africa, as being part of the African diaspora? If we define diaspora using strong definitions which emphasize orientation to a homeland and a collective black identity (Brubaker 2005), the popula- tions of the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio would be only marginally, if at all, considered part of an African diaspora, since they exhibit a weak to non-existent memory of slavery, minimal orientation to Africa as an ancestral homeland, and lack a black identity that is connected to Africa or other blacks. Therefore, their social reality does not encourage these populations' inclusion in the broader diaspora category. However, if diaspora is treated as a stance aimed at remaking the world (e.g. creating a diasporic consciousness) as opposed to describing it (Brubaker 2005), then there may be a more legitimate basis for including these cases under the umbrella term "diaspora."

On our second point, many scholars presume that the enslavement of Africans over four hundred years has inevitably left an indelible mark on the lives of people of African descent in the Americas. In some cases, this is true. In the U.S. context, the collective memory of slavery has played a vital role in the formation of an African American shared identity (Clarke 2006; Eyerman 2004; Gilroy 1993). However, the retention of the memory of slavery is by no means an inevitable outcome for descen- dents of slaves. Therefore, we encourage scholars to focus their efforts on uncovering the processes by which slavery is remembered (if at all) and how this influences understandings of ancestry and identity.

In both the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio cases, we found that a col- lective memory of slavery is only sometimes retained and, when retained, is largely devoid of personal meaning to those of African descent. Thus the relationship between memories of slavery, ancestry, and identity is far from linear-in the case of Veracruz, the memory of slavery exists and is loosely connected to understandings of African ancestry, but this has not led to the development of a strong black identity. In the case of Ingenio, a black identity exists in the absence of a memory of slavery and claim- ing of African ancestry. Consequently, a black identity does not neces- sarily imply knowledge of slavery or an understanding of African ances- try, and, simultaneously, knowledge of slavery and the claiming of African ancestry do not necessarily translate into a black identity. Given these findings, which contrast with some of the less nuanced accounts of blackness seen in the literature, scholars should continue to explore the relationship between slavery, ancestry, and identity, especially in the con- text of*mestizo* America.

A final argument we put forth is that urban environments and expo- sure to elements of the African diaspora do not necessarily lead to a black consciousness or identity. In other words, we critique the implicit logic forwarded in the literature that a black consciousness is more likely to surface in urban areas due to connections with a global diaspora. For example, Vaughn (2001), researching individuals of African descent residing in a rural region in Mexico, found a lack of a diasporic con- sciousness. However, he predicted that increased travel, access to mass media, and exposure to black social movements would likely lead to the development of a black identity. His prediction is not completely unfounded as capitalism and mass media have played an important role in the late twentieth century development of pan-Africanism, for exam- ple (Clarke 2006). However, our findings demonstrate that in the Port of Veracruz, an urban setting with important historical and contempo- rary connections to the African diaspora via the Caribbean and a history of exposure to mass media, an African consciousness is weak to nonex- istent. In contrast, in Ingenio, a small rural, isolated setting with little to no connection to globalized notions of blackness, there is a much stronger black identity, albeit devoid of connotations of African ancestry. Therefore, a simple explanation of degree of “exposure” to blackness or an African diaspora is not sufficient for understanding the dynamics of black identity construction.

In Latin America, where race is largely conceptualized on a color con- tinuum, exposure to a global population of individuals of African descent can, in fact, lead to a distancing from blackness. This is true of the case of the Port of Veracruz where the connection to the African diaspora and globalized blackness has served as a way for Veracruzanos, living in a nation where blackness is highly stigmatized, to define blackness as something foreign. Veracruzanos distance

themselves from blackness by defining blacks as individuals from Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the United States. In this case, exposure to the African diaspora has led to the*exportation* of blackness. In contrast, in the rural setting of Ingenio, where blackness is also stigmatized, the "othering" of blackness outside of Ingenio is more difficult given its isolated setting. This may be a reason residents are more likely to adopt a black identity. In the case of less-globalized regions such as Ingenio, the color contin- uum is comprised of phenotypes within the local population; residents make up the entire continuum, including the "black" end of the spec- trum. Hence, a rural setting can, under certain circumstances, foster the creation of a black identity. This is not to say that connections and ex- posure to the African diaspora cannot lead to a black consciousness.22 However, consistent with the broader theme of this article, we argue that scholars need to be cautious in assuming that particular circumstances will automatically lead to a particular outcome.

University of Colorado at Boulder
Christina A. Sue: Christina.Sue@colorado.edu
University of Kansas-Lawrence
Tanya Golash-Boza: tgb@ku.edu

Blackness in Mestizo America: The Cases of Mexico and Peru

Christina A. Sue and Tanya Golash-Boza

Since the late 1980s, there has been an explosion in diaspora studies across the globe, giving rise to debates within this nascent field of inquiry (Brubaker 2005). Diaspora scholars are struggling to address the complicated questions of how to define the diaspora, how to understand the diasporic experience, and whether or not we can speak about such an experience in any unifying sense. In this article, through an analysis of the experiences of members of the so called African diaspora in Mexico and Peru, we contribute to these debates by challenging a series of fundamental assumptions embedded in portions of this literature. We problematize the assumption that individuals of a particular diaspora will share a common identity or hold a diasporic consciousness. Further- more, we argue against the idea of a linear relationship between memo- ries of slavery, understandings of ancestry, and constructions of racial identity. Finally, we contend that forces such as urbanization and global- ization or even exposure to the greater diaspora will not automatically lead to a diasporic consciousness.

We draw on qualitative data to address the relationship between slavery, racial ancestry, and racial identity among populations of African descent in Mexico and Peru. We ask: *How do Mexicans and Peruvians of*
African descent construct their notions of slavery, ancestry, and contemporary identities, and how are these constructions understood in relation to an African diaspora? In the following sections, we address the relevant literature and
discuss our selection of the cases of Mexico and Peru. We then provide a brief background of each case, discuss our methodological approach, and present our findings.

Theoretical Overview

Within the diaspora literature, there is controversy regarding how best to define diaspora and how to determine who qualifies as a member of a particular diaspora. Prominent conceptualizations focus on disper- sion in space or orientation to a common homeland

(Brubaker 2005). The dispersion definition is most commonly used by scholars (Brown 2006), many of whom seek to uncover a thread of unity or collective experience among individuals of a certain diaspora. Critics argue this

definition is overly expansive and has little analytic power to capture a distinct experience (Brubaker 2005). Furthermore, they are concerned that a focus on commonalities between African-origin populations over- looks important differences (Campt 2006; Lewis 2000; Yelvington 2006).

Over the past few decades, there has been substantial scholarly writ- ing on the African diaspora in Latin America.1 However, broad defini- tions of diaspora have obscured the wide range of experiences and iden- tities of individuals of African descent in this region. To speak of what it means to be "black" in contemporary Latin America generally involves making invalid generalizations about a diverse population in a vast and variegated region. Like Hoffman (2006), in this study we are wary of imposing categories which assume a black identity or common exper- ience. Therefore, we focus on "strong" definitions of diaspora (e.g. orientation to homeland) that emphasize diaspora as a social form (Brubaker 2005). Despite the importance of investigating orientations to homeland among the descendants of African slaves, minimal research has been conducted on this topic in Latin America. Furthermore, few scholars have explored the relationship between orientations to home- land, memory of slavery, understandings of ancestry, and identity con- struction.

In scholarly accounts of the African diaspora, it is frequently implied, if not directly stated, that there is a strong interconnection between notions of slavery, ancestry, and identity. It is oftentimes presumed that communities of African descent will retain collective memories of slav- ery and connect these memories to their own ancestries and identities. For example, Paul Gilroy (1993) attributes many aspects of black dias- poric cultural production to the memory of slavery and contends that the memory of slavery is a key cultural resource for people in the African diaspora. However, in this article, we take a step back, asking: Is the memory of slavery always preserved? Is it always important or central to the construction of identity and culture?

We take the perspective that, although persons of African descent in the Americas*may* share similar conceptions of slavery, ancestry, and identity, it cannot be assumed that they*necessarily* will. Similar to Herman Bennett (2000, 112), instead of assuming that all persons of African descent will retain a memory of slavery, claim African ancestry, and develop black identities, we pose a fundamental question: *Under what circumstances will conditions of slavery and oppression produce a black consciousness?* This perspective moves us away from essentialistic thinking that equates African ancestry with memories of slavery and collective

blackness (Vinson 2006). In taking this stance, we do not intend to distance persons of African descent from the conditions of a brutal past and discriminatory present, but instead, we want to stress that these conditions may produce various outcomes in terms of understandings of slavery, ancestry, and identity. As such, we are interested in interrogating the*meaning* and*construction* of memories of slavery, ancestral ties, and self-identification for persons of African descent.

Scholars have primarily addressed issues of slavery and ancestral ties in Brazil, Colombia, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. For example, Twine (1998) found that Brazilians of African descent tend to distance themselves intentionally from "the degradation of slavery" by claiming their ancestors were not slaves (116). Similarly, in Colombia, many people of African descent attempt to distance themselves from slavery (Restrepo 2004) and construct their ancestry as being Colombian as opposed to African (Losonczy 1999). In the Dominican Republic, individuals also distance themselves from African ancestry by defining Haitians, not Dominicans, as Africans (Howard 2001). In terms of identity, scholars have found low levels of black consciousness and a rejection of a black identity in Brazil (Burdick 1998; Hanchard 1994; Telles 2004; Twine 1998), Venezuela (Wright 1990), Colombia (Wade 1993, 1997), Puerto Rico (Godreau 2000, 2006) and the Dominican Republic (Howard 2001). Recently, however, researchers have found, in countries such as Brazil, that some individuals are embracing a black identity (McCallum 2005; Sansone 2003; Sheriff 2001).

Although the aforementioned studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of the multiple meanings of blackness in Latin America, most of the work has been conducted in a few select countries in the region. Furthermore, although slavery, ancestry, and identity have been addressed to some degree, scholars often have emphasized only one or two of these components, as opposed to the interconnection of all three. To begin to fill these gaps in the literature, in this study we address the intersection between memories of slavery, understandings of ancestry, and constructions of identity for individuals of African descent in the understudied contexts of Mexico and Peru.

Case Selection

Within Latin America, scholars have categorized countries into two main types: Afro-Latin America and*mestizo* America (Mörner 1967). Afro-Latin America includes countries such as Brazil and the Spanish- speaking Caribbean, which exhibit a black/white racial continuum and

have a history of plantation-based slavery.2*Mestizo* America refers to Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, among other countries, where the primary ethnic or racial dynamic involves the Indian/*mestizo* [mixed-race person] distinction (Mörner 1967; Harris 1964; Wade 1997). In this article, as opposed to focusing on racial classification systems or racial demographics to make the Afro-Latin America versus mestizo America distinction, we focus on race-based national ideologies. Consequently, we define Afro-Latin American countries as those where blackness has been recognized in the image of the nation and mestizo American countries as those where the indige- nous narrative has been dominant.

In Afro-Latin America, blackness is oftentimes considered to be an integral part of national culture (Oboler and Dzidzienyo 2005). In cases such as Brazil and Cuba, blackness periodically has been framed as some- thing positive at the national level (de la Fuente 2001; Marx 1998; Telles 2004). In countries such as Colombia and Venezuela, blacks have been included in symbolic constructions of the nation, albeit to a lesser extent, and in more consistently disparaging ways (Wade 1993, 1997; Wright 1990). Traditionally, the literature on blackness has focused on Afro- Latin America; the African-origin communities of*mestizo* America have received less attention.

In*mestizo* America, the indigenous contribution to race mixture and national culture has been central to narratives of the nation, oftentimes coinciding with the exclusion of the African element (de la Cadena 2000; Foote 2004; Hernández-Cuevas 2004; Vaughn 2001). This was espe- cially apparent in the early twentieth century when national ideologies and race-mixing

projects defined the dominant mixture as indigenous and European. The marginalization of the African-origin population occurred not only in the realm of ideology but was also present in the academic literature. As Arocha and Maya (2008) note, “Despite advances in studies about Latin America and the Caribbean, scholars in the North continue to associate indigenous America with Mexico and Peru, and Afro-America with Cuba and Brazil” (401); this has led to a traditional lack of research on the issue of blackness in*mestizo* American countries.

Over the past few decades, there has been an increase in scholarly work on the history of slavery and the influence of African culture in some countries of*mestizo* America, such as Mexico.4 However, less attention has been paid to identity construction and the contemporary experience of individuals of African descent. In Mexico, of the studies that do exist, most focus on the Costa Chica,5 with minimal attention

being paid to other regions with African-origin populations, such as Veracruz.6 In the case of Peru, to the best of our knowledge, there are no published studies on this topic. Because of the relative neglect of blackness in*mestizo* America, we still do not have a solid understanding of important questions such as: *What does it mean to be black or of African origin in regions where blackness is largely excluded from the image of the nation?*

We present the*mestizo* American case studies of Mexico and Peru to shed light on this question and related issues. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Mexico and Peru were the largest importers of African slaves in Spanish America (Palmer 1976). Therefore, contemporary Mexicans and Peruvians of African descent frequently have ancestors who arrived via the Atlantic slave trade. The Mexico-Peru contrast was used by Mallon (1985) to address peasant struggles in these two regions. She argued that the main distinction between these coun- tries was that Mexico was able to incorporate indigenous demands into their agenda via the rhetoric of*mestizaje* whereas Peruvian elites tended to repress the indigenous population. Despite these differences, Mexico and Peru are similar in that indigenous/*mestizo* narratives have played and continue to play a central role in national ideology (de la Cadena 2000; Knight 1990; Urías Horcasitas 2007). Furthermore, elites in both countries have historically denied the African-origin presence in their countries and generally have assumed that peoples of African-descent have “disappeared” (Aguirre Beltrán 1970; Bowser 1974; van den Berghe 1967; Vaughn 2005).

Background on Mexico

Shortly after the Spanish conquest, there was a sharp decline in the indigenous population and a consequent need for labor, which spurred the importation of Africans to Mexico (Vaughn 2001). Slaves were brought to Mexico throughout the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries with the majority of imports occurring during the seventeenth century (Aguirre Beltrán 1944).7 The generally accepted view is that about 200,000 African slaves reached Mexico’s shores, although the number may have been higher since many slaves were imported illegally (Aguirre Beltrán 1944; Vaughn 2001). Slaves usually were imported through Veracruz and Acapulco and later migrated throughout Mexico (Aguirre Beltrán [1946] 1989; Martínez Montiel 1997; van den Berghe 1967). They primarily worked in mines, on sugar haciendas, or as domestic ser- vants. When the slave system collapsed in the early 1700s, the biological

integration of the population increased. Mexico's African-origin popula- tion lost its identity as a separate racial category and increasingly mixed with the Indian and Spanish groups (Cope 1994).

In the wake of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), Mexican elites strongly promoted race mixture and deemed the*mestizo* the national symbol of Mexico (Knight 1990). During this time,*mestizaje* was defined as representing the mixture between Spaniards and Indians which marginaled the historical presence of blacks in the country (Vaughn 2005). The erasure of the African element in Mexico continued during the "cultural phase" of the Mexican Revolution (1920-1986) (Hernández-Cuevas 2004, 2005). Largely due to narratives of integra- tion, by this time, it was generally assumed that the African-origin population in Mexico had disappeared.8

Background on Peru

Between 1528 and 1821, more than 100,000 African slaves were brought to Peru (Aguirre 2005); they were mainly imported to meet labor needs, principally in coastal agriculture. The African-origin popu- lation in the country grew steadily throughout the sixteenth and seven- teenth centuries, fueled by the expanding slave trade (Schlüppman 1991). Notably, not all individuals of African descent were slaves—of the approximately 80,000 blacks and mulattoes in Peru in 1591, only 40,000 were enslaved (Castillo Román 1977). By the seventeenth centu- ry, the colony could not operate without Africans and their descendants (Bowser 1974). Slaves and free blacks worked on the coastal haciendas and played an important role in the urban economy, working as cooks, servants, butchers, wet nurses, bricklayers, blacksmiths, tailors, laun- dresses, and in other occupations (Aldana 1989; Bowser 1974).

Peru gained its independence from Spain in 1821, yet nation-building projects were not very successful until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Larson 2004). When efforts to build the new nation took off, the focus was primarily on the "Indian problem," with little attention paid to Afro-Peruvians. Peruvian leaders proposed education- al reform as a solution to the "Indian problem" in the early twentieth century, but did not propose similar programs for the black population. In fact, blacks were imagined out of the nation—Peruvian officials downplayed the numbers of blacks in Peru, an effort reflected in official counts of the black population during this time.9 Whereas elites focused on integrating the indigenous population, with regard to blacks, the pri- mary goal was elimination.

Methods

For the Mexican case, we draw on 112 semi-structured interviews10 and participant observation, conducted by the first author, over the course of twelve months in 2004 and 2005 in the Port of Veracruz (pop- ulation 439,481), the major city in the state of Veracruz which is situat- ed on the Gulf of Mexico.11 The Port of Veracruz was once the richest port within the Spanish colonial empire and the major port of entry and incorporation of African slaves to the plantations (Carroll 2001). Today it is a major sea port and a key component of the circum-Caribbean region (Hoffman forthcoming). Not only does the Port of Veracruz have a historical African slave presence, Caribbean immigrants migrated to the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Hoffman forthcom- ing), although African slaves were a much stronger demographic force.12

For the Peruvian case, we draw on fifty semi-structured interviews and participant observation

with African-descended Peruvians, conduct- ed by the second author, over the course of nine months between 2002 and 2007 in Ingenio de Buenos Aires (approximate population 2,500). Ingenio is located in north coastal Peru and lies in a valley in the foothills of the Andes. The majority of the inhabitants of Ingenio are descendants of African slaves. Today, most families in Ingenio own a plot of land, from which they can eke out a meager existence. Villagers' livelihoods are tied to the production of rice for the national market. The Port of Veracruz-Ingenio contrast captures both an urban and rural dynamic. The Port of Veracruz represents the epitome of an international city with exposure to globalized notions of blackness whereas Ingenio is typ- ical of a rural "black" town within mestizo America.

Findings for the Port of Veracruz, Mexico

Understandings of Slavery. Roughly 70 percent of the 112 Veracruz respondents were aware, to some degree, of Mexico's history of African slavery. Most reported having learned about slavery through their ele- mentary school training but did not attribute much importance to this history and frequently would minimize it. For example, one respondent described the study of slavery as unimportant but "obligatory" reading for school children. In addition to the lack of interest in learning about slavery, there was a conceptual disconnect between the historical pres- ence of African slaves in the region and Veracruz's contemporary African-origin population. In other words, most Veracruzanos, while aware of the slave history, did not usually think of Veracruzanos of

African origin as being the living embodiment of this history. This applied to respondents of African- and non-African origin alike. When Vera- cruzanos of African descent were asked about slavery, most struggled to recall abstract details from their elementary school days; their responses were largely devoid of a personal connection between slavery and their own ancestry. The meaning and significance of slavery was far removed from their identity constructions.

Racial Ancestry. Most respondents of African descent13 implied or directly stated that they were of mixed heritage, although often they were not aware of the particular components of their heritage. In these cases, they sometimes resorted to the local narrative of*mestizaje* in Veracruz—the mixture of "three roots" (Spanish, indigenous, and African). For example, when Bernardo, a 43-year-old professor of psy- chology who self-identified as*negro* (black), was asked about his racial background, he responded: "Here in Veracruz there are three races which are the Spanish, the black and obviously, what is it called here in Veracruz? The Totonaca, the indigenous." Bernardo, like others, con- structed his heritage based on his understanding of the racial mixture in the region.

The majority of Veracruzanos of African descent did claim some form of black ancestry (they preferred the term*negro* or Cuban and rarely voiced a connection to Africa). However, this heritage did not appear to be particularly meaningful for respondents and was only mentioned after some probing during the interviews. About half of the respondents who claimed black heritage spoke about it in terms of their personal, familial lineage, whereas the other half discussed their heritage in the context of the ancestral roots of Veracruz. In nearly all cases, respondents demon- strated either a weak understanding or a complete lack of knowledge regarding the specifics of their African or black heritage.

The lack of specific knowledge regarding the respondents' African or black heritage is understandable given that most of them could not recall any conversations within their family about such ancestry. The absence of generational transfer of ancestral information about African heritage can be seen in this statement made by Alfredo, a 56-year-old fisherman who self-

identified as mestizo:

Alfredo: Yes, many slaves stayed here and I believe that we are descended from them, including myself. I believe that probably, I descend from the slave race.

CS: From Africans?

Alfredo: I imagine so…I never asked my dad about race— I don't know, out of embarrassment or respect, I don't know.

CS: You haven't asked him?

Alfredo: Nor do I ask him about color, my father [pause]. Because he was*negro*…Not*negro*,*negro*,*negro*. No. He was*negro*,negro,*negro* African*negro*, I don't know what. Really big. The*negro* race.

CS: But you never talked about it?

Alfredo: No, he never told us.

This passage reveals the social silence that frequently surrounds issues of blackness, which consequently impacts understandings of individuals' ancestral background.

In contrast to black heritage, Veracruzanos of African descent demon- strated a much greater awareness of and concerted effort to discuss their European heritage. Knowledge of this heritage is frequently circulated within families. Consequently, European ancestors were consistently highlighted in respondents' genealogical discussions. In addition, con- versations which the interviewer initiated about non-European ances- tors were oftentimes redirected by respondents to a discussion of their European heritage. For example, Vanesa, a 30-year-old working-class housewife who self-identified as*morena* (brown), described her pheno- type as resembling that of her father who she characterized as having "a flat nose, big eyes and curly hair." However, she did not connect these features to a black ancestry until the interviewer probed, at which time she said her parents were of Cuban14and Spanish descent. She then quickly launched into a discussion about her grandpa who was "*blanco* (white) with blue/green eyes" and her great grandparents who were "*blancos* with blue eyes." Throughout the remainder of the conversation, there was no more mention of Vanesa's Cuban ancestors. A racial hier- archy was clearly evident in the reconstruction of genealogical histories.

Racial Identity. The claiming of black ancestry by some respondents of African descent did not translate into a clear and consistent assertion of a black racial identity. The case of Veracruz seems to follow the broad- er pattern of what we know about race in Latin America- ancestry does not determine racial identity. Therefore, although many Veracruzanos chose to claim black heritage, this did not necessitate them identifying as black. Furthermore, the majority of respondents of African origin strug- gled with identifying themselves racially. They were much more com-

fortable identifying in color categories, such as*moreno* (brown). In terms of race, a black identity did occasionally surface, but in inconsistent and contradictory ways.

Black identity for Veracruzanos of African descent is fluid and am- biguous, making it the epitome of a social construction. For example, Rodrigo, a 37-year-old fisherman, self-identified as*moreno* but is referred to by fellow fishermen as "very negro." During an interview, Rodrigo

demonstrated a very complex position on blackness. He described his ancestors as being from the "dark" race and his phenotype as representing the*negro* race. However, Rodrigo stressed that he was not*negro*, although he alluded to his "negro blood." At one point, he shared his love for music and dance and then proceeded to justify this affinity:

The instinct, the instinct— do you know that the black race (*raza negra*) invented the music? The slaves and all of that, right? On some occasions there are songs that have a message about the slavery of the past…well more or less we [the fami- ly] identify like that and we consider that we have some mix- ture or something in the blood of that black race that existed before and continues to exist.

Following this remark Rodrigo clarified that his family was not "really *negro*," but a mixture of races with darker skin. Rodrigo's ambivalence between associating himself with and distancing himself from blackness was typical of many respondents of African descent in Veracruz.

In another case, María, a 54-year-old daycare worker, expressed her racial identity indirectly by telling the interviewer that there are*morenos* like herself who are "almost, almost negros." In a separate conversation, María referred to her blackness when talking about Memín Pinguín, a black Mexican comic book character:

CS: Can you remember a time when you thought about your color and what it means in society?

María: Well, I didn't do what Memín Pinguín did, cover my face with powder— or like the*negrita* in the movie,15 of putting powder on myself. What for? The blackness isn't going to come off of a person.

Despite this comment suggesting an acceptance of blackness, when the interviewer asked María if she could take her picture, she consented but then disappeared into her bedroom, emerging with her face covered in a foundation so light that it gave the appearance of a white mask.

In another example of the ambiguity surrounding a black identity, Carlos, a 54-year-old high school teacher, responded to an interview question about his racial identification indirectly by referring to how others classify him, which, in turn, led him to describing himself as *negro*:

Carlos: Okay…In my house, they have called me*negro* since I was born, but well, that is…

CS: They called you that?

Carlos: *Negro*. But that is what it is like. My mom was*blanca* like you or even more so maybe and my dad was*moreno*, but well, I am*negr*o and I have a brother who is whiter and that is that…Lots of mixture. There is not an established definition among us all…my sisters, have blonde hair, which is natural, not dyed, and green eyes.

Although Carlos did eventually self-identify as*negro*, he then turned to emphasizing the whiteness of his family. In another part of the conver- sation, he clarified that he considers himself to be*negro* in terms of color but*mestizo* in a racial sense, demonstrating the broader trend that indi- viduals are particularly reluctant to identify as racially black. Carlos justified his dark skin as being due to sun exposure, again distancing himself from black racial connotations. In part of the conversation not shown here, Carlos did claim black heritage, but in a way that

implied that black ancestry is common to all Veracruzanos.

Findings for Ingenio, Peru

Understandings of Slavery. In Ingenio, respondents were very open to talking about slavery and the cruelties it engendered. Although inter- view questions were designed to gauge collective memories of the enslavement of Africans, respondents frequently referred to more gen- eral notions of exploitation when asked about slavery, describing the cruel treatment of hacienda workers in the region. Very few residents of Ingenio were aware that chattel slavery had been an institution particu- lar to Africans and their descendants. For example, Alfonso, a self-iden- tified*moreno* born in 1915, reflected on his experience as a young boy:

When I first came here, we still had slavery. Poor people were treated very badly. The*hacendado* would say "we don't need donkeys as long as we have poor people." He would say that as he hit people. Since the*hacendado* had people as slaves, he would whip them.

Like Alfonso, many residents of Ingenio conflated slavery with share- cropping and other forms of exploitation. Residents of Ingenio defined slavery as working for little to no wages, corporal punishment, or forced labor, conditions not particular to African-descent peoples. Consequently, most perceived slavery as existing well into the twentieth century.16

Part of the reason residents of Ingenio may not think of slavery in rela- tion to African slavery is because, when chattel slavery was outlawed in 1854, many former slaves continued to work on the plantations, and their life conditions changed little.17 Therefore, African slavery and its aboli- tion are not a significant part of the collective memory in Ingenio. In addition to a lack of a collective memory of African slavery, most people in Ingenio did not see themselves as having ancestral roots in Africa.

Ancestry. Although many of the interviewees self-identified as*negro* (black), very few believed they had African ancestry. For example, Liliana, a *morena clara* (light-brown skinned woman) in her fifties stated: "My father was very dark-skinned, very*negro* but we were never told that we were Africans." Of the 51 Ingenio interviewees, only twelve claimed African ancestry. In contrast, 13 reported being unsure if they had African ancestry and 26 asserted they did not have African ancestry. Residents self-identified as Peruvians and generally were unaware of (1) how or when their ancestors had come to live in Peru, (2) that, prior to 1492, there were most likely no people of African descent in the Americas, and (3) that Africans were primarily brought to Peru as slaves.

The vast majority of interviewees also indicated that they did not have European, indigenous, or Asian ancestry. An example of this can be seen with Perla, a 50-year-old mother of seven who referred to herself and her children as*negros*. Perla was born in the neighboring village, but had spent all of her married life in Ingenio, with the exception of a few visits to her daughter, Fiorela, who lives and works in Lima. Below is an excerpt from her interview:

TGB: So, your great-great grandparents also were born here?

Perla: All of them.

TGB: Ah, all of them. And, do you know how they got here, to Ingenio?

Perla: No, I don't know, no.

TGB: You don't have any idea?

Perla: No, I don't have any idea how and why they came, no.

TGB: You don't know if you have African ancestry or ancestors who came from Africa?

Perla: No.

TGB: And, do you know if you have indigenous ancestry, or ancestors who are indigenous to Peru?

Perla: No, I don't either.

TGB: European or Spanish ancestors?

Perla: No.

TGB: Asian?

Perla: No, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.18

TGB: Do you know what your roots are, or where your ances- tors came from? Apart from that they are from here, you don't know?

Perla: No, I don't know.

TGB: And, ah, have you heard; do you know the history of how Africans came to Peru?

Perla: I don't know, no.

Perla's conception of her ancestry is an example of a more general pat- tern in Ingenio—people's knowledge of their ancestry is based on the family members they know personally since most villagers reported that they had not heard stories from their elders about their own ancestry.

Like Veracruzanos, many Ingenio residents described their ancestry as "black, but not African." For example, Diana, a young woman who self- identified as*morena* and*negra*, when asked if she had African ancestors, responded that she was aware that her ancestors were black, but did not think they were African. Fabio, Perla's husband, a 50-year-old agricul- tural worker who self-identified as*negro*, gave a similar response al- though he is atypical of most respondents in that he has been involved sporadically in a black social movement. When asked about his roots, Fabio stated, "We are blacks." Upon further probing, he reported that blacks came from Yapatera, a nearby village, where they were brought as slaves by different plantation owners. In his narrative, Fabio demon- strated that he was aware that Africans were brought to Peru as slaves. Nevertheless, despite knowing about Peru's history of African slavery, being aware that Africans were black, and self-identifying as*negro*, Fabio did not identify his ancestral roots as African. Like most interviewees, he denied Spanish or indigenous ancestry as well, and claimed a black ancestry. Fabio's simultaneous denial of Spanish and indigenous ancestry makes it less likely that his claiming of black ancestry is an attempt to distance himself from African roots; more plausibly, he is simply un- aware of any familial connections to Africa.

As mentioned above, the least common response among interviewees was to claim African ancestry. Armando, a 43-year-old agricultural worker, who self-identified as*negro*, was one of the few respondents who traced his family lineage back to Africa. Armando was by far the most well-read of the Ingenio respondents. Most of what he had learned had come from books; he developed a love for reading as a small child and read every book he could get his hands on. In

an interview, he described the experiences of African slaves and directly connected his family histo- ry to that experience.

Armando: The labor power which was, the*negros*, people that were brought from Africa, or, slaves, to work in the fields. So, around here, Alto Piura, there was a place where pri- marily*negros* settled, Yapatera. So, from this black race (*raza negra*) that arrived there, from these slaves, since independence came, these people stayed there. They no longer moved, and with freedom, they had access to own land, a piece of land, and began to move to other places and other towns. As such, the race spread out. So, my grandfather met my grandmother in Chulucanas, in an annex close to Yapatera. So, my grandfather was*moreno*,
negro, and, well, they got married.

Armando's understanding of his ancestry was not based on the transmis- sion of knowledge from his elders, but through his own investigations and reading about Africa and the slave trade. However, Armando was a rare case; most people from Ingenio did not claim African ancestry although this did not prevent them from embracing a black identity.

Racial Identity. Most of the Ingenio respondents described them-
selves as*negro* or*moreno*, or a combination of these identifiers. Accord- ing to most interviewees, what distinguishes a*negro* from a*moreno* is skin color; *negros* are darker than*morenos*, although a person could be both
*moreno*and *negro*, depending on the context. Residents generally did not
display aversion to the black (*negro*) label. Some identified strongly with the label, others indicated that they were socially viewed as black, and only a very few insisted that black was not an accurate description of them, because of their light skin color. When the 51 interviewees were asked how other Peruvians would describe them, 28 responded that oth- ers would classify them as*negro*. The other 23 interviewees felt they were socially viewed as*moreno* or*zambo*19. However, these racial classifications are complex. For example, Diana, the young woman referenced previ- ously, initially said that others viewed her as*morena* but later claimed that

*negro*and *moreno*meant the same thing. Furthermore, she stated that she
would not be offended if someone called her*negra*, demonstrating that her self-description as*morena* is not necessarily an attempt to distance herself from blackness or to avoid the black label. Of the 23 interviewees who did not identify as*negro*, six said that*moreno* and*negro* meant the same thing but that others would describe them as*moreno*. An additional 7 indicated that they were from black families.20 Finally, 7 interviewees rejected the black label, arguing that blacks are dark-skinned (which they are not). Thus, of the 51 interviewees, only a small minority completely disassociated themselves from the black category; these 7 respondents felt they were best classified as*moreno* or*zambo*.

Carmen, a woman in her late forties, is a typical example of a respon- dent who did not consider herself to be black because of her light skin color. She is married to Germán, a man in his mid-fifties. Together they own a small corner store and a plot of land. In the interview, Germán self-identified as*moreno* but said his wife calls him*negro* as a term of endearment. When asked how people might refer to her, Carmen was not sure how to respond. She said she was probably*morena*, clarifying that*blanca* referred to people with very fair skin, and that she was not

*blanca*because she is not light-skinned enough. However, she also asserted that no one refers to her as*negra* and she does not think of herself as such because she does not have dark skin. In contemplating her racial identity, Carmen never considered her ancestry; the discussion revolved around her color. This dynamic can also be seen with Fabiola, a teenage girl with very fair skin and straight brown hair. Fabiola is identified by many villagers as*blanca*, although no one considered her parents to be *blancos*, due to their slightly darker skin.

Identity construction in Ingenio depends heavily on color and very lit- tle on ancestral background. A final example of the salience of color and the non-deterministic nature of ancestry in identity construction is Fabio and his wife, referenced previously. Both identify as*negros* but Fabio describes two of their children as*trigueños* (literally, wheat-colored), since they have lighter skin than their parents. This indicates that, despite Fabio's consciousness of his black roots, he defines blackness based on skin color. Like Fabio, residents of Ingenio understand that blackness*can* be transmitted inter-generationally, but do not believe that it*must* be transmitted inter-generationally. Skin color is privileged in constructions of blackness; blacks are defined as individuals with dark skin. For many residents, a black identity exists devoid of knowledge of African ancestry or awareness of the history of African slavery in the region.

Case Comparison

In examining the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio cases, we notice some interesting similarities and differences. In both contexts, a strong con- nection to a collective memory of slavery or African ancestry is absent. Our findings suggest that the marginalization of discourses of slavery and African ancestry may be due to a lack of concrete knowledge about the African slave trade and/or one's ancestors as opposed to an inten- tional denial of this information, as has been posited in previous studies. Furthermore, when comparing these two cases we found an interesting oppositional dynamic— in the Port of Veracruz we see the phenomenon of "black ancestry without black identity" and in Ingenio "black identi- ty without African ancestry." Although seemingly contradictory, these two manifestations of a relationship between ancestry and identity actu- ally demonstrate an underlying similarity—the privileging of color in identity construction. Finally, the Port of Veracruz-Ingenio comparison revealed that respondents from Ingenio embraced a black identity, which was not the case in the Port of Veracruz. In this section, we will address these major findings in more depth.

The cases of the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio demonstrate that per- sons of African descent in these regions either do not retain the memo- ry of chattel slavery (Ingenio) or retain this memory but do not ascribe meaning to this memory as it relates to their own ancestries and identi- ties (Veracruz). The weak link to slavery that we have seen in these two cases may be due to the absence of state-endorsed efforts in*mestizo* America to retain memories of slavery and connect this history to the ancestral origins of the nation's population. In the absence of these state-sponsored efforts, genealogical histories are constructed locally; these constructions are determined by the racial hierarchy in a given site, the tradition of passing down ancestral information, and the degree of ancestral knowledge held by earlier generations. In the case of Veracruz, individuals privilege European ancestral information and readily trans- mit this knowledge. In contrast, they generally downplay or do not transmit ancestral knowledge related to African ancestry. In the case of Ingenio, there is a general lack of passing on knowledge about ancestors whether European, indigenous, or African. In both cases, there appears to be little to no familial knowledge of ancestry related to Africa.

Our findings complicate the literature on blackness in the region. Scholars have previously described the reported lack of knowledge about African ancestry by individuals of African descent as "denial," "avoid- ance" or "willful forgetting" of such heritage (Twine 1998; Winant

2001). However, our findings suggest an alternative interpretation. In the case of Veracruz, respondents who did not report being of African ancestry generally did not appear to be intentionally hiding information about their African heritage; however, when respondents were aware of such heritage, there was a tendency to downplay it. Therefore, it is pos- sible that, instead of denying such heritage, respondents simply lack knowledge about African ancestors. Although it is difficult to uncover the actual degree of knowledge of respondents, our interpretation is sup- ported by other scholars' findings. For example, Cruz Carretero (1989) found that in Mata Clara, a rural town in the state of Veracruz, 56 per- cent of respondents were unsure about why there are blacks in the region or where they came from (94). Furthermore, Martínez Montiel (1993) notes that in Mexico there is not a conscious negation of African heritage but a tradition of inheritance which has excluded discussion of African ancestors (157). Therefore, denial by previous generations might have evolved into a lack of knowledge for newer generations as the denial may have manifested in the lack of passing down ancestral information. The interpretation of a lack of knowledge as opposed to denial is most strongly supported by the case of Ingenio, where there is an absence of knowledge of ancestral roots across the board, including that of European ancestors.

Regarding the relationship between ancestry and identity, the cases of the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio demonstrate seemingly opposite trends. In the Port of Veracruz there is "ancestry without blackness"— a claim of black or African ancestry which does not usually translate into a black identity.21 However, in the case of Ingenio, we saw the opposite trend of "blackness without ancestry," where individuals self-identify as black without associating this identity with African heritage; a black identity exists devoid of any notion of ancestral connection to Africa or memory of slavery. Although our two cases provide seemingly conflict- ing findings, an underlying dynamic explains both manifestations of the relationship between ancestry and identity— the importance of pheno- type.

In Veracruz, the black label is conservatively applied and is reserved for those at the darkest end of the color continuum. Therefore, individ- uals with African ancestry but whose phenotypes do not represent the "blackest" component of the population are often not considered black in society. Phenotype overpowers ancestry in racial identity construc- tion. In Ingenio, phenotype is also very important and largely deter- mines who is considered black; however, these designations take place in

the absence of connotations of African ancestry. Again, phenotype is more salient than ancestry. In Veracruz, notions of black or African ancestry are flexible and do not neatly overlap with a black identity. In Ingenio, black identities are expansive and generally do not overlap with or necessitate an understanding of African ancestry. In both cases, phe- notype is the main factor in identity construction.

In terms of identity, respondents in Ingenio were much more likely to claim a consistent black

identity compared to Veracruz respondents. The findings from Ingenio challenge much of the literature on Latin Americans of African descent which presents an image of shunning contemporary blackness and avoidance of the black category (Degler 1971; Hanchard 1994; Harris 1952; Twine 1998; Winant 2001). Our findings from both cases demonstrate that the avoidance of blackness, while sometimes occurring, is not the whole story; individuals of African descent exhibit myriad identities ranging from complete avoidance of blackness to embracing it. Returning to our comparison, the fact that black identities were more likely to surface in Ingenio, a rural, isolated setting, compared to the Port of Veracruz, an urban, international set- ting, challenges some existing assumptions about how and where black identities are most likely to form. We will address this final point in the conclusion.

Conclusion

In this article we have used qualitative data to shed light on the under- studied phenomenon of the experiences of individuals of African origin in parts of*mestizo* America. Mexico and Peru represent cases in*mestizo* America in which the collective memory of slavery and contemporary blackness are largely absent from national discourse. This contrasts sharply with many Afro-Latin American countries where national ide- ologies centralize slave histories, the African contribution to national culture, and the African "root" of the population. In*mestizo* America, when there is an absence of national-level discourses addressing black- ness, local constructions of slavery, ancestry, and identity become more important. As such, it is necessary to interrogate the multiple manifesta- tions of local understandings of blackness, both in historical and contemporary terms. In this article we addressed the*mestizo* American coun- tries of Mexico and Peru.

Our findings have led us to make three principal arguments that con- tribute to the literature on blackness in Latin America and the broader literature on diasporas. First, we argue that many differences exist with-

in the broadly defined "African diaspora" in Latin America and that it is important to take locality into account when interrogating these dynam- ics. We have adopted the perspective articulated by Clarke and Thomas (2006) that "identities remain bounded by local experiences" (27) and that "context is everything" when addressing the process of racial for- mation (32). In particular, we argue that scholars need to pay attention to the nations of mestizo America which have been understudied in the literature. Second, we argue that scholars need to spend more time inter- rogating the complicated relationship (or lack of) between notions of collective memory of slavery, ancestry, and identity, as opposed to assuming a linear relationship. Finally, by examining both rural and urban settings, we are able to demonstrate how the formation of a black consciousness is not necessarily stimulated by an urban environment, exposure to other individuals of African descent, or African diaspora ide- ologies and culture.

Related to our first point, we argue that scholars should not treat all African-origin communities as analytically similar, a frequent occur- rence when discussing the "African diaspora." For example, in reference to this diaspora, Hamilton et al. (2007) describe the "dispersed peoples of African descent" as "communities of consciousness" (31). Critiquing this approach, Campt problematizes "diaspora as the requisite approach or theoretical model through which one should (or perhaps must) understand all formations of black community, regardless of

historical, geographical, or cultural context" (2006, 108). Others such as Hoffman (2006) and Brubaker (2005) problematize the outside imposition of the African diaspora concept on those who do not exhibit a black conscious- ness or whose identity is not associated with Africa as a homeland. The imposition of a diaspora label largely neglects the experience of individ- uals of African descent who feel little or no connection to Africa or a black identity.

So, to what degree should we think of these populations, which assert no connection to Africa, as being part of the African diaspora? If we define diaspora using strong definitions which emphasize orientation to a homeland and a collective black identity (Brubaker 2005), the populations of the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio would be only marginally, if at all, considered part of an African diaspora, since they exhibit a weak to non-existent memory of slavery, minimal orientation to Africa as an ancestral homeland, and lack a black identity that is connected to Africa or other blacks. Therefore, their social reality does not encourage these populations' inclusion in the broader diaspora category. However, if

diaspora is treated as a stance aimed at remaking the world (e.g. creating a diasporic consciousness) as opposed to describing it (Brubaker 2005), then there may be a more legitimate basis for including these cases under the umbrella term "diaspora."

On our second point, many scholars presume that the enslavement of Africans over four hundred years has inevitably left an indelible mark on the lives of people of African descent in the Americas. In some cases, this is true. In the U.S. context, the collective memory of slavery has played a vital role in the formation of an African American shared identity (Clarke 2006; Eyerman 2004; Gilroy 1993). However, the retention of the memory of slavery is by no means an inevitable outcome for descen- dents of slaves. Therefore, we encourage scholars to focus their efforts on uncovering the processes by which slavery is remembered (if at all) and how this influences understandings of ancestry and identity.

In both the Port of Veracruz and Ingenio cases, we found that a col- lective memory of slavery is only sometimes retained and, when retained, is largely devoid of personal meaning to those of African descent. Thus the relationship between memories of slavery, ancestry, and identity is far from linear-in the case of Veracruz, the memory of slavery exists and is loosely connected to understandings of African ancestry, but this has not led to the development of a strong black identity. In the case of Ingenio, a black identity exists in the absence of a memory of slavery and claim- ing of African ancestry. Consequently, a black identity does not neces- sarily imply knowledge of slavery or an understanding of African ances- try, and, simultaneously, knowledge of slavery and the claiming of African ancestry do not necessarily translate into a black identity. Given these findings, which contrast with some of the less nuanced accounts of blackness seen in the literature, scholars should continue to explore the relationship between slavery, ancestry, and identity, especially in the con- text of*mestizo* America.

A final argument we put forth is that urban environments and expo- sure to elements of the African diaspora do not necessarily lead to a black consciousness or identity. In other words, we critique the implicit logic forwarded in the literature that a black consciousness is more likely to surface in urban areas due to connections with a global diaspora. For example, Vaughn (2001), researching individuals of African descent residing in a rural region in Mexico, found a lack of a diasporic con- sciousness. However, he predicted that increased travel, access to mass media, and exposure to black social movements would likely lead to the development of a black identity. His prediction is not completely

Notes

1 For examples see Andrews 2004, Arocha, and Maya 2008; Conniff and Davis 2002; Davis 1995; Hoetink 1973; Mosquera, Pardo, and Hoffman 2002; Nuñez 1980; Peréz Sarduy and Stubbs 1995; Rout 1976; Wade 2006; Whitten and Torres 1998.

2Andrews (2004) defines Afro-Latin America as countries where people of African ancestry make up 5-10 percent or more of the population (4).

3 Euro-America refers to countries in the southern cone (Argentina, Uruguay, and Southern Chile), the zone which has received the largest wave of European immigrants within the past 100 years (Mörner 1967).

4 For the historical experience see Aguirre Beltrán 1944; Bennett 2003; Carroll 2001; García Bustamante 1987; Herrera Casasús 1991; Martínez Montiel 1993; Naveda Chávez-Hita 1987, 2001; Palmer 1976; Vincent 1994; Vinson III 2001; Winfield Capitaine 1988; Vinson III 2004. For the African influence on Mexican culture see Hernández-Cuevas 2004, 2005; Martínez Montiel 1993; Ochoa Serrano 1997. For more general overviews and/or discussions of Afro-Mexicans, see Hoffman 2006; Martínez Montiel 1997; Muhammad 1995; Vinson III and Vaughn 2004.

5The Costa Chica is a 200-mile long coastal region beginning just south-east of Acapulco, Guerrero and ending near the town of Puerto Angel, Oaxaca. For studies of this region see Aguirre Beltrán 1946, 1958; Althoff 1994; Campos 2005; Flanet 1977; Gutiérrez Ávila 1988; Lewis 2000, 2001, 2004; Tibón 1961; Vaughn 2001.

6 For exceptions see Cruz Carretero 1989; Martínez Maranto 1997; Sue 2009.

7The slave trade ended in 1817.

8The supposed disappearance of this population was questioned when, in the 1940s, Aguirre Beltrán ([1946] 1989, 1958) studied a "black" population in the Costa Chica.

9For example, in 1884, there were 18,320 documented blacks and mulattos in Lima (Cuche 1981), yet by 1908 the official count had dropped to 6,763 (Stokes 1987). Although there may have been declines in black fer- tility, or increases in black mortality, this precipitous decline in the black population cannot be explained by demographics alone.

10 About one fifth of the respondents were of African descent.

11 Research was also conducted in Boca del Río (population 134,754) which is geographically merged and socially well-integrated with the Port of Veracruz.

12 Approximately 2,716 Cuban individuals arrived to Mexico between 1870 and 1900, which roughly represents the "great wave" of Cuban migration (García Díaz 2002). This compares to the approximately 200,000 slaves which arrived to Mexico.

13In the sections on ancestry and identity, we only focus on respondents of African descent.

14Veracruzanos often use*Cuban* as a codeword for blackness.

15She is referring to the film *Angelitos Negros* which she watched as part of a focus group exercise.

16Slavery in Peru ended in 1854 and the hacienda system came to an end with agrarian reforms in the early 1970s (Cuche 1981).

17 This seems to have been common across Peru. Cuche (1981) presents

evidence that some slaves were unaware of emancipation and that life continued as it had prior to abolition and Aguirre (2005) contends that conditions for slaves did not change drastically after abolition.

18Many of the interviewees laughed when asked if they had Asian ancestry. We interpret this laughter as meaning that it is obvious that they do not have Asian ancestry.

19*Zambo*is a colonial classification that means a black-Indian mixture. In Ingenio, it was most often used to refer to tightly curled hair.

20They classified their mother, father, siblings, or children as*negros.*

21 This finding is consistent with research in cases such as Brazil, where many people who do not self-identify as black claim African ancestry (Telles 2004).

22 This has been documented in some cases (Anderson 2005; Sansone 2003; Sawyer 2006).

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